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SAFEGUARDING RURAL HOMES AND FAMILIES FROM RELIEF ROLLS

A radio talk by J. C. Kendall, Director of the Extension Service, Durham, New Hampshire, delivered in the Land-Grant College Radio Program, January 16, 1935, and broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

At the beginning of the new year it was estimated that there were nearly a million rural families on relief. Probably as many more are close to the edge. If they, too, should give way, the avalanche would be a national disaster.

What can keep these endangered families from the relief rolls? Thus far, it has been principally their pride. That is a fine thing, but it is not enough. By itself pride cannot buy shoes or mend a barn roof. It must be backed up by an initiative that breaks through and finds a way around all obstacles. In the old days this initiative could be largely an individual affair. The family ground its own flour, made its own clothing, hewed its own logs. Today life is more complex. We are more dependent upon each other. And frequently individual initiative is not enough. It must be supplemented by action on the part of the community, the county, the state, and the nation.

The Federal Government has recognized its obligation in this respect. It has developed a carefully planned program of Rural Rehabilitation. You will hear more of this later.

My appeal to you is that we should see to it that the local community matches this Federal initiative. In New Hampshire we have attempted to meet the situation by setting up community committees. The town selectman, the local relief agent, the subsistence garden leader and other public spirited men and women meet to consider what can be done to set up employment exchanges, to swap labor for capital, and to stir up the old neighborhood spirit of giving a hand to the family that is down.

Self help in dealing with unemployment may be extended through cooperation between rural communities and between rural and urban centers as illustrated by a project in one county where a plan was evolved to employ 89 men who had experience in the woods living in seven near-by towns to cut several hundred cords of fuel wood needed for relief purposes in two cities. Not only were the unemployed thus helped to help themselves, but the sixteen farm woodlot owners participating were helped through stumpage payments and some of them made good use of the money by clearing up back taxes. Furthermore the wood was cut under supervision as a woodlot improvement project.

In another town a widow with several children was living in a house with a leaky roof. It was impossible to heat the house, and the family suffered severely from the cold. The owner agreed to furnish the materials, and the community will supply the necessary labor. This is getting back to the old neighborhood raising bee.

One family was found without sufficient milk supply, but with a fair sized woodlot. It was suggested that they swap the wood for enough hay to keep a cow. This they did, and now have enough milk and cream to give the children all they need.

In many towns the women on the committees have canvassed the entire town
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for old and unused clothing. They have found so much available in some cases that they have not only provided for all needs, but have made a card index of what was left so that future needs could be more readily met.

In some cases a family needs, above all, encouragement. They must make the land produce as much as possible of their own living. This means a large and varied garden of both vegetables and fruits. It means large amounts of stored and canned food. It may mean a family cow, a family hog, a family flock of chickens. It means cutting our own fuel wood and so far as possible our own lumber. It means avoiding all possible out-of-pocket expense through an exchange of labor, goods, or by doing our own carpentering and making our own repairs---perhaps doing our own plumbing..

In these and many other ways we are trying to carry on. Let us have the courage to tackle in every possible way the difficult and intricate problem which faces us.

While the most important need may be more capital, we must not forget that in the meantime there is human life that must be conserved.

Let us remember that we have a community responsibility for our neighbors who are in trouble; and let us pull together to get them back on their feet.